

**“The Best of Both Worlds?” Youth, Gender,
and a Postfeminist Sensibility in Disney’s Hannah Montana**

One of Disney Channel’s hottest properties, Hannah Montana (2006-2011)¹ remained wildly popular in reruns and related merchandise well after the final episode of its fourth season—especially among girls ages six and fourteen throughout the United States, as well as internationally. The show is best known for being the vehicle to fortune and celebrity for pop singer, songwriter, and actor Miley Cyrus, who was eleven years old when she first auditioned for the show. Like much Disney fare, Hannah Montana promotes and reproduces hegemonic ideologies of heteronormativity and conventional gender roles and expectations, but I aim to explore here the particular ways in which the series also employs contradictory discourses in its construction of girlhood(s). Narrative devices such as doubling, secret identities, and camp work, in Hannah Montana, to construct girlhood in relation to stereotypical femininity, notions of “ordinary” teen/tween life, and fantasies of wealth and celebrity. Not only are the boundaries between “both worlds”—the “authentic” world and the world of celebrity—blurred for lead character and typical girl, Miley Stewart, and her alter ego, pop star Hannah Montana, but they are blurred by the real-life celebrity of Miley Cyrus and the intersections between her characters’ lives with her own.

In contrast to other girl characters on popular TV who lead secret lives in which they have mysterious and magical powers to wield, Miley Stewart exhibits her talents, in the same ways that Miley Cyrus does outside the confines of the narrative, as products of dedication and labor—albeit labor that is frequently rendered invisible. The show’s use of celebrity, in relation to adolescent femininity, does the most work toward positioning

constructions of Hannah Montana and Miley Stewart and Miley Cyrus within a particularly consumerist, postfeminist context. In such a context, each girl or character can be understood as having chosen to perform a femininity that finds its locus in the maintenance and control of the body, as an illustration of her power as a girl, though without reference to the girls' "empowerment" rhetoric of "girl power" or Third Wave Feminism more prevalent in representations of girlhood throughout the 1990s. By examining the complex representations of contemporary girlhood in Hannah Montana within the context of the circulation of a postfeminist sensibility, as Rosalind Gill refers to it, this project asks: What are the iterations of postfeminist discourse in Hannah Montana, and what are their ramifications for discursive constructions of U.S. girlhood? Via discursive, narrative, and ideological textual analysis of this popular program, then, this essay also works toward a more clearly defined presence for girls and girlhoods within contemporary theorizations of postfeminist discourse.

Methodology and Theoretical Perspective

Hannah Montana lends itself to discursive and ideological textual analysis, not only as an intensely popular vehicle for representations of girlhood targeting girl audiences, but also as a result of its role as a valuable property in the Disney empire. Its affiliation with Disney Channel and The Walt Disney Company affords the program discursive and ideological power that demands interrogation. Critical of Disney products, environments, and practices, Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock have explored Disney's many forms of "public pedagogy," including both intentional and perhaps unintentional ventures into media and products that socialize and educate their consumers and

audiences in particular ways and to particular ends. For them, “media culture defines childhood, national identity, history, beauty, truth, and individual agency” (Giroux and Pollock 2010, p. 2). As one of the world’s largest media conglomerates, Disney wields significant power in U.S. culture, as well as globally. Eric Smoodin’s edited collection, Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom, complicates the accepted wisdom that Disney has been and remains politically conservative, exploring the contradictions that arise in Disney’s discourse and practice. These Disney scholars are well aware of the relationships between discourse and knowledge, and the ideological power that can be attributed to such prolific cultural products. Of course, ideologies take hold in different ways or not at all, depending on variation in contexts and subjectivities. Here, I am most interested in the complex ways in which contemporary girlhood(s) are “put into discourse” through representations on Disney Channel (Foucault 1995, p. 27).

As a white, U.S. American, cisgender female researcher, pursuing study of media texts that primarily privilege whiteness and heteronormativity, I cannot and do not presume to offer definitive or even comprehensive readings of the examples that follow. Instead, my aim is to provide a glimpse into how representations of girlhood can be interpreted and to complicate my own interpretations wherever possible. To that end, I have chosen to offer close readings of some of the contradictory discourses and ideologies present in a few illustrative examples initially culled from a comprehensive listing of episode synopses and numerous incidental viewings across the life of the Hannah Montana series. In addition, I use a purposeful sampling of episodes from the duration of the show’s four seasons (2006-2011), chosen for their representations of girlhood, specifically in relation to money, consumerism, celebrity, femininity, age, and

interpersonal relationships. By taking a qualitative approach to Hannah Montana, I consider the series as “an indeterminate field of meaning” which requires interpretation, rather than a “closed, segmented object with determinate, composite meanings” (Larsen 1991, p. 122). As I conduct my interpretive work, I also aim to make clear the assumptions and allegiances that frame this research.

My adherence to a discursive and ideological approach to textual analysis is rooted in Foucaultian conceptualizations of discourse and power, such that discourse allows for the dissemination of socially constructed concepts and ideals, which wield cultural power and knowledge just as they generate sites of resistance. Cultural power is best understood, here, in the Gramscian sense of the functions of hegemonic ideologies, which are many and fluid—constantly changing and challenged, yet inescapable. Through this framework, I analyze discourses of girlhood at the intersections of economic privilege, contemporary femininity, whiteness, and youth.

I take a constructivist approach to locating meanings in media representations. That is, I understand representation as “a practice, a kind of ‘work’, which uses material objects and effects...” and culminates in “the production of meaning through language” (Hall 1997, pp. 25, 28). In relation to popular media, meaning is conveyed through spoken and visual discourses that produce multiple interpretations. Therefore, while this analysis stems from my own interpretations of meaning, I find it necessary also to complicate these readings by allowing for the polysemy of the texts and the potential for different hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated readings. This research, then, follows critical cultural studies perspectives on issues of representation and mediated discourse,

yet it derives its theoretical foundation more directly from girls' media scholarship regarding contemporary cultural constructions of femininity, feminisms, and youth.

Below, I discuss my perspective regarding postfeminist discourse, but first I want to clarify what I mean when I attribute my analysis to a feminist theoretical perspective. Here, I am most invested in female-centered media content, female-oriented media address, performances of femininity, the social construction of gender, and the relationships between popular notions of (and reactions to) feminism and representations of gender. Recognizing the intricacies of intersectional identity politics, this article attempts also to explore the functions of youth, whiteness, and class privilege in the discourses of girls foregrounded in its sample of texts. As such, my perspective could be referred to as a "Third Wave Feminist" one. While scholars have contested the oversimplification of feminisms into a few "waves" and continue to debate the definitive tenets of each "wave" and its attendant feminist perspectives, "Third Wave Feminism" has been accepted as a movement distinguishable from the Second Wave. Many also understand it as a transformation of Second Wave praxis for a changing political and cultural climate. In addition, Third Wave Feminism is often conflated with conceptualizations of postfeminism. In the context of my research, a Third Wave Feminist perspective refers to a focus on intersecting identity politics, an awareness of shifting power dynamics and emerging forms of subjectivity, and an understanding of gender as fluid and performative. Judith Butler has theorized gender in this way, expanding on Simone de Beauvoir's oft-cited assertion that "[o]ne is not born, but rather, becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir 1974, p. 301). For Butler:

[G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time--an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted

through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (1988, p. 519)

My analysis of constructions of femininity in relation to celebrity and visibility rely heavily on this notion of everyday performances of identities and the surveillance and “stylization” work of gendering practices.

As I focus on the discourses of girlhood employed in the work of sustaining one of the largest media conglomerates in the world, I must incorporate into that feminist perspective a particular understanding of U.S. media conglomeration. Such conglomeration can be understood as part of the operation of a particularly privileged global patriarchy. “The dominant global forces at work are capitalist, masculine, white, western, middle-class, heterosexual, urban, and highly mobile” (Hawthorne 2002, p. 32). As a conglomerate that produces extremely popular media texts targeted to and featuring girls, Disney relies, in part, on the exploitation of girls and girlhood to grow and sustain its position as one of the Big Six media conglomerates (in addition to Viacom, Time Warner, Comcast/General Electric, News Corporation, and The Sony Corporation of America). Disney must, therefore, be understood in relation to discourses of postfeminist culture and girlhood, but with a clear understanding of how the company’s use of girls might privilege masculinist commercial media conglomeration.

Girlhood in Postfeminist Discourse

Anita Harris’ concept of “can-do” girlhood, as well as Angela McRobbie’s theorization of postfeminist culture, Sarah Projansky’s work on girls’ representation in contemporary media, and Rosalind Gill’s discussion of a “postfeminist sensibility” form a foundation for conceptualizing postfeminist discourse in relation to girls. McRobbie

and Gill explore the ways in which postfeminist discourse is intricately intertwined with the privileging of youthful femininity, though these scholars do not analyze the implications of such discourses for young females (i.e. girls and girlhoods). Harris does, however, when she theorizes the “can-do” girl as critical in the “remaking of subjectivity” (2004, p. 16). For Harris, the “can-do” girl is “the ideal late modern subject...who is flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven, and self-made and who easily follows nonlinear trajectories to fulfillment and success” (2004, p. 16). The “can-do” girl becomes a vessel for society’s fears, anxieties, and hope for the future in contemporary, neoliberal culture, while her opposite, the “at-risk girl,” functions as a scapegoat for misaligned and oppressive social and economic systems. Harris’ view of twenty-first century girlhoods clearly aligns with theories of postfeminist culture, such that “girling” or “girlification” is not just a matter of infantilized womanhood or the feminization of culture, but relies on the recognition that girls have access to power in a culture that imbues them with so much potential and fortitude while it strives to exploit their consumption and visibility.

Sarah Banet-Weiser employs McRobbie’s work on postfeminist culture in her exploration of consumer citizenship in Nickelodeon’s Clarissa Explains It All (1991-1994). Though she makes some unfortunate elisions, her analysis allows for an understanding of early postfeminist representations of girlhood on popular television. In Kids Rule!: Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship, Banet-Weiser seems to discuss “postfeminism” as a form of feminism without distinguishing between Third Wave feminism and the anti-feminist discourse of postfeminist culture, when she states that, “Third Wave feminists and postfeminists are produced in a very different cultural and

political context from that of feminists of the twentieth century” (2007, p. 120). First, I would argue against her easy divestment of Third Wave feminists from the entirety of the twentieth century since riot grrrl and girl power feminists were in fact most active during the 1990s and can be understood as being linked to certain aspects of Second Wave feminism and as early iterations of the so-called Third Wave, with respectful recognition of the connections between these feminisms. While Christine Griffin has argued that 1990s’ girl power discourse “constituted the world as inherently ‘postfeminist’,” girl power simultaneously functioned as a call to action and solidarity among riot grrrl communities and other feminists, even as it was being swiftly co-opted and commodified (Projansky 2007, p. 43; Griffin 2004, p. 33). Banet-Weiser argues that Clarissa (played by Melissa Joan Hart) of Clarissa Explains It All (1991-1994) is a character who, as Harris describes, is part of “[the girlpower] generation of young women...who are self-assured, living lives lightly inflected but by no means driven by feminism, influenced by the philosophy of DIY, and assuming they can have (or at least buy) it all” (Harris 2004, p. 17). I would argue that Clarissa is, thus, distinguishable from representations of girls in contemporary postfeminist discourse, which divests them of any such philosophizing and feminist awareness, replacing those influences with the influences of fashion and beauty industries and, as in the case of Hannah Montana, an obsession with public visibility via greater attention to the control of the body.

In addition, it is necessary to distinguish postfeminist discourse from forms of feminism—there is no *postfeminism* in terms of feminist movements, and it is likewise difficult and unproductive to categorize persons as “postfeminists”. Debates will, I hope, continue over how such terms have been and are being used, since, as meanings shift, it is

important to be ever-vigilant about what we mean when we refer to forms of feminism, or anti-feminism, as the case may be. Here, I approach contemporary postfeminist discourse as a dispersed and changing cultural phenomenon, rather than being constitutive of a focused movement. It is recognizable as a particular framework within which representations of women are decidedly *anti*-feminist, while often relying on abuses of feminist rhetoric, both spoken and visual. For McRobbie, “the attribution of apparently post-feminist freedoms to young women most manifest within the cultural realm in the form of new visibilities, becomes, in fact, the occasion for the undoing of feminism” (2009, p. 55). McRobbie has equated “post-feminism” with a sort of “double movement” to the extent that young women are able to earn respect and power in the public sphere on the condition that feminism fades away, pointing also to the destructive significance of postfeminism to feminism (2009, p. 55). Rather than configure postfeminist discourse as a product of postfeminism, it is useful to think of postfeminist discourse circulating alongside feminist discourses, both historically and in contemporary contexts, not as a female-powered bid for social change, but as a product of patriarchy and consumer culture, continually reproduced in commercial media representations.

My assessment of postfeminist discourse is rooted in Gill’s conceptualization of postfeminism as a sensibility predicated upon the assumption that gender equality is no longer cause for social contest. Both McRobbie and Gill theorize postfeminism, or postfeminist discourse, as most apparent and pervasive in the surveillance and policing of female bodies increasingly taking place on the part of women and girls themselves---on behalf of fashion and beauty industries. The postfeminist pretense of gender equality empowers women and girls to “choose” to embrace the technologies of femininity via

narcissistic consumption in a celebration of the ever more intricate artifice of a particularly white, privileged femininity, which is easily conflated with femaleness in a racist, classist, heteronormative sex/gender system. Thus, the appearance of the female body becomes the locus of femininity, and the maintenance of the feminine body is steeped in the rhetoric of choice as an endless series of supposedly positive and empowering, autonomous consumer decisions for women and girls toward the goal of emulating popular culture's mediated versions of femaleness, (which are most often thin, heavily made-up, fashionable when clothed, smooth-skinned, air-brushed and enhanced young, white women). While Gill and McRobbie focus on young adult women, Sarah Projansky has analyzed girls' media and culture in order to begin locating girls and girlhoods within contemporary discourses of femininity and to explore the challenges for the field of girls' studies. Projansky calls for girls' studies scholars to "focus attention on the inextricable combination of disruption and containment, and of at-risk and can-do, in the contemporary popular discursive construction of girlhood" (2007, p. 69). Using Banet-Weiser's and McRobbie's work as models for this approach, she explores the need for feminist media studies scholars interested in girls and girlhood to move beyond simple categorizations of media representations as particularly feminist or anti-feminist. In response to her call, then, this chapter attempts to explore the contradictory functions of postfeminist discourse in Hannah Montana. In many ways, the girl characters on Hannah Montana, and Miley Cyrus as well, are exemplary of the sort of consumer "empowerment" that appears uncomplicated by feminist politics, the difficulties of youth, or by the potentially harsh realities of being anything but white and privileged in the U.S.

Fantasy, Celebrity, and the Postfeminist Masquerade

Several girls' programs have constructed girlhood using the trope of a secret identity, but it is the public nature of Miley's fantastical secret life that distinguishes Hannah Montana. While her immediate family and her two best friends, as well as a few others along the way, do gain access to Miley's secret life, the crux of many Hannah Montana episodes is Miley's desire to maintain boundaries between her two worlds. Herself an adolescent girl uprooted to Los Angeles from a home in Tennessee so she can pursue a career in entertainment, Miley Cyrus plays Miley Stewart, a girl with a similar history who struggles to keep her pop stardom secret throughout the series. Some narratives of girlhood have relied on voice-overs and diary entries to convey a girl's "secret" inner life, while shows like The Secret World of Alex Mack (Nickelodeon 1994-1998), Sabrina the Teenage Witch (ABC, WB 2000-2003), Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB 1997-2003), and Wizards of Waverly Place (Disney 2007-2012) instead allow girls to play out many, often conventionally more masculine, behaviors about which they might otherwise only fantasize. These girl protagonists usually have magical powers to control and keep hidden, but Miley's power comes from her musical talent, her work as a performer, and her continued success in the public sphere. Hannah Montana employs the ruse of the secret identity as a focal point of many plots and gags, but, ultimately, Miley's two worlds must be integrated in order to sustain the narrative.

Tensions between normative girl identities and celebrity or star personas, and between authenticity and performativity, are repeatedly raised and then mitigated in the series' continued attempts to reproduce and normalize celebrity girlhood via the "girl next door" trope. With minimal assistance from her ever-present father, manager, and songwriter, Robbie Ray Stewart (played by Miley Cyrus's real-life dad, musician Billy

Ray Cyrus), Miley Stewart enjoys what she considers a typical girl's life. As she sings in the theme song, "Best of Both Worlds," during the title sequence of each episode:

You get the best of both worlds
Chill it out, take it slow
Then you rock out the show. . .

Who would've thought that a girl like me
Would double as a superstar. . .

You get the best of both girls
Mix it all together
Oh yeah
It's so much better cuz you know you've got the best of both worlds.²

She "takes it slow" by attending public school, making friends (and enemies), hanging out on the beach, and pursuing her crushes as Miley Stewart. And she "rocks out the show" by attending parties with her celebrity friends, performing at concerts, appearing on talk shows, and getting hounded by fans and paparazzi in costume as Hannah Montana. While the world of school seems much different from the world of the rock concert, Miley's worlds are so interconnected that they are barely distinguishable from one another.

Miley's supposedly more mundane, "normal" life is directly facilitated by her stardom in ways that are rarely if ever mentioned within the show. Miley Stewart, and her family and, to some degree, her friends, have access to a wealth of privilege and resources---free time and disposable income, a spacious home on a scenic beachfront, control over their daily activities (with the exception of having to attend school), fulfilling social relationships, financial security, and family stability. Miley's mother passed away when she was younger and her father spends much of his time fixing snacks in the kitchen, styling and discussing his hair, napping, and playing guitar in the living

room, giving a sense that Miley/Hannah may be the bread-winner in this family. Robbie Ray's domestic role and constant presence in the home suggest a certain feminization and a challenge to stereotypical gender roles, perhaps leading one to assume that, in a somewhat masculine turn, Hannah's work sustains the family financially. While the economic function of Hannah's labor is rarely explored, her pop career is consistently framed as hard work that results in celebrity and privilege. Thus, Miley Stewart's "normal" girlhood is envisioned as contingent upon Hannah's stardom, blurring the divide between the two worlds she desperately wants to keep separate.

Miley/Hannah's foray into the limelight might be envisioned as a sort of masculine performance, however, she also provides a clear example of what Anita Harris calls a 'can-do' girl, in that she exhibits "flexibility and self-actualization" and her successes appear to be the result of her "good choices, effort, and ambition" (2004, p. 16). Success (here, the continued fantasy of stardom) is not necessarily just the result of work or "good choices" in Hannah Montana since it is only rarely questioned, always excessive and publicly displayed, and never really out of reach. This element of fantasy in Hannah's existence inflects, and is impacted by, Miley Cyrus' presence in the public eye. While her extraordinarily famous, blonde, more heavily costumed and stereotypically feminine self, Hannah Montana, might be envisioned as darker-haired Miley Stewart's alter-ego, she can also be understood as counterpart to Miley Cyrus. Hannah may trouble an otherwise stereotypical character, but she does so only to the extent that Miley Stewart makes an effort to convey that she prefers the "normal" life over the particularly feminine excesses of her celebrity life, all the while bolstered by the knowledge that her peers idolize, obsess over, and fantasize about her other self or selves.

There is minimal disconnect between Miley's "two worlds," and both of her fictional lives are reflected in the experience of Miley Cyrus. As Erin Meyers has argued, "the blurring of the private/public distinction that occurs in celebrity media is essential for the maintenance of [a star's] power" (2009, p. 892). This iteration of the girl with a double life relies heavily on distinctions between celebrity and reality, between the essentialist construction of Miley's life as a typical girl's experience in contrast to the glamour and entitlement of being Hannah. Boundaries are easily blurred when Hannah Montana's version of reality depends upon the popularity and visibility of the fantasy, which in turn is presented as a reflection of the reality of the performer Miley Cyrus's very public life.

In the series' pilot episode, the apparent significance of the fantasy and the distinctions between Hannah and Miley (Stewart) are laid bare such that Miley's participation in consumer culture, as well as in the public sphere of performance work, makes her a younger representative of what McRobbie has named a new "postfeminist masquerade" (2009, p. 64-67). Miley's power as a productive citizen must be disguised in particularly nonthreatening, feminine ways as she (i.e. Hannah Montana) steps into public view. But the "highly-styled disguise of womanliness" (instead, here, I would say "girly-ness") is imagined as Miley's own choice to take up the artifice of femininity in order to enact her power as an expressive subject (McRobbie 2009, p. 67). And while that element of choice, as McRobbie explains it, "becomes synonymous with a kind of feminism," it results in rituals of bodily maintenance that "constitute the post-feminist masquerade as a feminine totality" (2009, p. 66). If Hannah Montana is the embodiment of "feminine totality" for Miley Stewart, then Miley may be left lacking. As the pilot plays out, Miley's desire to hide her disguised self in order to live normally (though clearly, still a

very privileged life), as well as the ways in which that hidden self exceeds her control, establishes itself as the premise of the series.

In that first episode, Miley's dad convinces her to reveal her secret identity to her best girlfriend, Lilly, who, naturally, is one of Hannah's (many) biggest fans. Miley worries that Lilly will reject her for Hannah, clearly recognizing Hannah Montana's celebrity as a powerful force that threatens her "true" identity. After Lilly spoils the secret by sneaking into Hannah's dressing room backstage at a concert and seeing her without her sunglasses, Miley decides to show Lilly just what it means to be Hannah Montana. "Wait 'til you see this," Miley says, opening the closet door in her bedroom. Miley and Lilly step into the small closet with one horizontal bar running its length, crowded with clothes and hat boxes. Lilly asks, "Why am I standing in your closet?" Miley replies, "Because, behind my closet is . . . my closet," sweeping aside the clothes and ceremoniously swinging open the previously hidden double doors, monogrammed with "HM". Hallelujahs ring out as Miley presents her vast, brightly lit closet. The camera closes in on Lilly as her jaw drops, then features her perspective in a series of close-ups on the color-coordinated shoes, clothes, and accessories that line the walls. "It's like a dream, a beautiful, beautiful dream," Lilly breathes, before rushing over to the nearest pair of boots. "O.K. Dream's over. I've got to have these!" Miley demonstrates the technological functions of the shoe racks to further astound Lilly, but when Lilly gets caught on the rotating clothes rack and, in her excitement, calls Miley "Hannah", Miley gets upset—this is just what she feared would happen. Lilly's ecstasy at being invited into the private realm of her favorite superstar illustrates the impact of Hannah's celebrity, which feeds on the blurring of private and public worlds. Entry into "the

Hannah closet” also reveals the extent of Miley’s attempts to disguise the constructed nature of her celebrity persona. While disguising the work of stardom may be integral to the maintenance of the star persona, as Richard Dyer has argued, the great reveal here also allows audiences an occasion to embrace fandom and celebrity aspirations through identification with Lilly and/or Miley (1998, p. 20). The excesses of the closet and its disguise make Hannah appear to be a meticulously constructed star persona. Yet, rather than dismantling that persona, this revealing moment suggests that pleasure can be found in trying on that image for one’s self, one fashionable shoe at a time.

Although Lilly and Miley eventually resolve their conflict, Miley’s fear of being displaced by Hannah Montana is clear in her worry, in the expansiveness of the previously hidden closet, in the monogrammed initials of her stage name, and in Lilly’s reaction to it all. For Dyer, “the general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American Dream, organized around the themes of consumption, success, and ordinariness” (1998, p. 35). Miley Stewart’s constant pleas on Hannah Montana to be seen as “just a normal girl,” in conjunction with Miley Cyrus’ pleas in public press to be forgiven for her mistakes (such as after Annie Leibowitz’s photos of her in Vanity Fair raised eyebrows), because “I’m not perfect,”³ easily legitimate “notions that human attributes exist independently of material circumstances” (Dyer 1998, p. 43). Fear that the fantasy may easily overwhelm Miley’s less excessive reality will plague her throughout the series, even though the only things that distinguish Miley Stewart from Hannah Montana are Hannah’s blonde wig, boots, sequined tops, and accessories. In this way, Hannah Montana is “a beautiful dream,” as Lilly remarks. Constantly juxtaposed in relation to the greater authenticity of Miley’s life as a typical girl, Hannah is constructed

as an empty fantasy to be experienced through and contained within the material excesses of contemporary femininity. Meanwhile, Miley Stewart works to maintain those constraints within which she leads her double life. To live out her fantasy as a pop star, Miley Stewart must adopt these feminine accouterments, disguising, if not implicitly attempting to improve upon herself to maintain her celebrity image and the very public career that sustains her family. It should be noted, also, that the blurring of worlds between Miley Cyrus and her Disney Channel characters has strengthened multiple brands---Disney Channel's, Cyrus's, and the Hannah Montana franchise, not to mention Radio Disney's, Hollywood Records', and many more. As products of The Walt Disney Company, Hannah Montana, and arguably also Miley Cyrus, become vehicles for Disney's trademark wholesomeness and for the reproduction of female stardom as ordinary.

Emphasized Femininity and an "Alternative" Girlhood

Perhaps Miley's most effective foil, Lilly makes a bold entrance early in the show's pilot episode as Miley's spunky, tomboyish best friend. She calls to announce she'll be "landing in 20 seconds," and the Stewart family, not having revealed their secret to her yet, snaps to action to transform Miley into her "normal" self by concealing her sparkly pink Hannah costume. Jackson zips her into a blue hooded sweatshirt and swings open the doors through which Lilly will launch herself into the house on her skateboard, sailing through the living room to grab Miley by the shoulders and announce with giddy excitement that she's "landed two tickets to the hottest concert in town!" Lilly screams in delight from under her protective helmet, but Miley is speechless, knowing that Lilly is

one of Hannah Montana's biggest fans and the concert can only be hers. Lilly's entrance emphasizes her more masculine (i.e. active) nature as a tomboy compared to Miley's doubled femininity, and her excitement about the concert can be read both as particularly "girlish" and as an enactment of what Meenakshi Gigi Durham calls girls' "homospectatorial gaze" when it comes to young female pop stars (2004).

Miley's cover in that first episode—her wig-flattened hair, sneakers, jeans, sweatshirt, and her position (in this instance serving juice to her friend) at home surrounded by family—reinforce her connection to Lilly by variously hiding and demonstrating different markers of privileged femininity. Miley hides her perfect blonde "hair", custom-tailored bedazzled costume, space in the spotlight, and millions of fans, things Lilly does not possess; Miley demonstrates a straightforward domesticity and modesty that Lilly seems to share via their similar casual, sporty attire and the domestic setting of the home in which they spend much of their time. Their close friendship is clear in the familiarity between them, yet it isn't until later in the episode that Miley reveals her secret identity to Lilly. And in the following episode Lilly acquires her own secret identity, Lola Luftanza (later Lola Luftnagle), complete with brightly dyed, color-coordinated wigs and elaborately accessorized costumes, enabling her to accompany Hannah to concerts, parties, and promotional events, bringing the two (or four, depending on how you count) even closer.

As a self-professed tomboy, Lilly's form of female masculinity might seem easily confined to her youth and the asexual nature of pre-pubescent girlhood early in the show. Yet as she becomes interested in romance, she does not abandon her active pursuits, friendships with boys and other tomboys, or her disregard for feminine propriety, much

to Miley's chagrin. During the third episode of the second season, Miley sides with her popular, mean girl nemeses Amber and Ashley calling into question Lilly's understanding of "how to be a girl." Miley repeatedly begs Lilly to "act like a girl," and when Lilly protests, saying "I know how to be a girl," Miley responds by asking why she doesn't have a date for the upcoming dance. Lilly then admits that she has a crush on fellow skateboard enthusiast Matt, and agrees to let Miley take her shopping and make her over from "skate chick" to "date chick." As a "skate chick," Lilly can express a type of alternative girlhood (Kelly et al. 2005, p. 130). According to Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie, alternative girlhood consists of a "range of ways that girls consciously position themselves against what they perceive as the mainstream in general and against conventional forms of femininity in particular" (2005, p. 130). Skater girlhood, then, can function in opposition to what Raewyn Connell has called "emphasised femininity." Emphasized femininity refers to women's compliance with male dominance through practices and behaviors---particularly oriented to "sexual receptivity in relation to younger women" (Connell 1987, p. 187). By claiming allegiance to a fluctuating set of negotiated practices and ways of being, like those associated with skater girlhoods---those whose focus generally does not revolve around normative sexual receptivity---girls such as Lilly can oppose established structures of domination (Connell 1987, p. 183; Kelly et al 2005, p. 131).

The above exchange between Miley and Lilly blatantly calls attention to the performativity of femininity while also anchoring it firmly in heteronormative romance narratives in which girls must seek approval and attention from boys on the basis of their ability to successfully perform femininity. But Miley's "Hannahfication" of Lilly

ultimately doesn't take since the options for conventionally gendered behaviors and beings are limited to impossible, unnuanced ideals. Lilly's crush, Matt, reveals that he was more interested in the "real" (i.e. the skate chick) Lilly, and Lilly chooses to re-articulate her "alternative" girlhood rather than try to uphold the tenets of emphasized femininity that appeal more to Miley/Hannah. Lilly's maturing body and more feminine clothing, styled hair, and make-up do, however, contribute to her more feminized look in the later seasons.

Even as Lilly dresses in more feminine attire and pays more attention to her hair and make-up as the series progresses and she ages, her secret identity, celebrity double Lola Luftnagle, can be read as an embodiment of parodic camp from the very beginning. Her name is reminiscent of The Kinks' hit song, "Lola," about a man discovering he's fallen for a transvestite. And, rather than link her instead to Nabokov's *Lolita* and versions since, Lilly's costumes are not particularly revealing or overtly sexual, nor do they emphasize her figure. They are excessive and work to disguise her body—brightly colored and thoroughly accessorized, she seems to wear a different neon wig for every outfit. While Miley's Hannah costumes suggest a single, familiar blonde entity, Lola's garb appears to put Lilly in a sort of drag, as her costumes and affectations constantly shift away from the convincingly realistic. Lola's costumes couldn't be further from her "everyday" clothes or actual hair. As a tomboy, Lilly may be always already performing masculinity through a female body. But Lilly and Lola cannot sustain the dissonance between their (shared) sex and gender necessary to theorize a drag performance here. In fact, it is difficult to categorize Lilly's performance as Lola simply as a performance of gender, since the impetus for Lola is to disguise Lilly in a way that allows her access to

the privileged status of the young socialites and celebrities that surround Hannah Montana. While Lola's appearance and behaviors call attention to the excesses and efforts employed to generate a more spectacular and feminine presentation of girlhood for Lilly, the result is also a kind of failed femininity. For Connell, "Central to the maintenance of emphasized femininity is practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation" (1987, p. 188). As Lilly attempts to comply with Miley's sense of feminine propriety, she performs an exaggeration of youthful femininity in a collection of wigs, but tends toward the boyish—tomboyish—in relation to Hannah's masquerade of girlishness. In this way, Lilly's Lola disguise can work as a foil to Miley's Hannah, never threatening to displace Hannah's idealized girlhood. While Lilly enjoys the blinding visibility offered by Lola's fabricated femininity, Lola remains unable to fit in with the rich, young female celebrities and socialites she aims to mimic and also to mock.

When Lilly brings Lola to life as Hannah's best friend in the fifth episode of season one, Hannah's socialite pal, Traci Van Horn (played by Romi Dames) immediately labels her "weird" and "uncool". Backstage before a sold-out Hannah Montana concert, Traci comments on the "weird girl" in Hannah's dressing room, who is sticking her tongue in the chocolate fountain. When Lola appears, covered in chocolate, chattering at top speed, and easily distracted by pop star sightings (this time, Gwen Stefani), Traci's assessment proves accurate, and Hannah feels the need to try and keep Lola under wraps. Later in the episode, Hannah reveals her dilemma to Lilly by pointing out that it is embarrassing for them both when Lola walks around covered in food or obsesses over every celebrity she sees. And Lilly/Lola adapts accordingly, though

ultimately her obsession with Orlando Bloom is allowed to run rampant when Hannah lets her follow him into one of Traci's fancy parties. As usual, Hannah manages to be the arbiter of feminine propriety, even when it comes to Lilly's performance of a tomboy in drag. And, even more than Lilly might somehow benefit from Miley's "Hannahfication" in later episodes, Lola apparently *needs* Hannah's guidance if she means to blend with the likes of Traci Van Horn, the shrill, stylized, feminine, spoiled teen celeb that rules Hannah's social calendar.

In a season two episode titled "The Test of My Love," Lola reveals herself to be the same rambunctious, star-struck sidekick who Traci must tolerate and who Hannah only sometimes celebrates. When Lilly volunteers herself as Lola to take Hannah's place in Traci's "Put-Put for Puppies" charity event so that Miley can go on a date with a boy, Traci fears Lola's presence will ruin her event. Traci eventually calls Hannah to complain, and we catch a glimpse of Lola in the background clamoring head-first over a fence to chase down her crush, actor Orlando Bloom. While Miley's penchant for a somewhat reserved femininity keeps her policing Lilly's conventionally more masculine behaviors and interests, repeated references to Lilly's interest in boys and heterosexual romance work to seal the deal (in a heteronormative sense) between her female body and her performances of femininity.

Doubling and Fragmented Girlhood

In addition to illustrating the work of negotiated femininities in Lilly's performance of Lola, it is useful to discuss the function of "doubling" as a recurring trope in the Hannah Montana narrative. Doubling, as Moya Lockett has argued regarding The

Patty Duke Show, can connote “the fragmented and contradictory nature of teenage girls’ subjectivity” (1997, p. 101). Miley and Lilly may represent fragmented girlhood identities, in order to offer simplified characterizations, but they each in turn elect to further fragment their own experiences through the use of doubles. Miley and Lilly craft additional identities, formed around celebrity status, both to generate celebrity as well as to contain it. Until the Hannah/Miley distinction becomes unbearable, it is necessary to maintain those double identities in order to protect the girls’ “real” lives from the potentially harmful influences of Hannah’s fame. To know Hannah better, Lilly must become Lola; to continue their friendship, Lola and Hannah must remain Miley and Lilly’s shared secret.

While doubling reinforces the privileging of emphasized femininity in the show—particularly for Lilly and her double, Lola, but also when considering Lilly in relation to Miley and Hannah—Luckett argues that the use of doubling and confessional devices in such narratives (like the use of voice-over narration and girls’ diaries) also emphasizes the importance of single sex friendships in girl culture (1997, p. 101). Here, the friendship between Miley and Lilly, and the desire on both parts to share in Hannah’s experiences, motivates the creation of Lilly’s double Lola. Not to be excluded, Miley’s other best friend Oliver gets to know her secret soon after she reveals it to Lilly, and he too gets a double, Mike Standly III, with a thick goatee and colorful, hip-hop-influenced costumes. His appearances on the show are infrequent after the first two seasons, however, and ultimately, after becoming Lilly’s primary love interest, he leaves to go on tour with his band. They maintain their relationship from a distance, while Lilly moves into the Stewarts’ home thus further emphasizing the girls’ bond as best friends.

While Miley does not appear to keep a diary and the narrative generally does not rely on voice-over narration, there are a few occasions when Miley's inner thoughts and anxieties come to light through dreams and visions. Late in the series, in one of the final episodes when she is nearing the breaking point, which will result in her finally divulging her secret to the world, Miley speaks to Hannah. Seeing and conversing with Hannah through the mirror above her vanity table in the spacious bedroom she now shares with Lilly, Miley comes face-to-face with the impossibility of her double life and her fragmented identity. Ultimately, she must battle with the girl in the mirror rather than relying on her best girlfriend, her dad, or her boyfriend to tell her what to do. (Yet they do tell her, and she listens.)

Through the mirror, Hannah scolds Miley for letting her friends sacrifice their dreams to help keep her secret, saying, "I can't believe you're gonna try to solve your problems by letting your friends make all the sacrifices for you. I thought your father and I raised you better than that." As they argue, each refers to the other as "I," repeatedly acknowledging their shared identity. Yet, reflected in the mirror that hides an updated version of the vast Hannah closet, Hannah herself convinces Miley that she needs to change her tactics. Miley ultimately realizes that she needs to confess her secret to save her rocker boyfriend from being despised for "cheating" on Hannah when he's caught dating Miley, to allow Lilly to go her own way by attending Stanford (the college of her dreams) when Miley leaves to work on a movie in Paris, and also to help herself accept the fact that her secret identity "doesn't seem to be doin' such a bang up job anymore" when it comes to protecting her "normal life." By removing the Hannah wig on national television, Miley sacrifices her double for the greater good. The confessional device and

doubling work together, then, to reveal Hannah's emptiness and Miley's real existence, while simultaneously foreclosing certain narrative possibilities by deconstructing the ruse. Thus, in the final episodes of the series, Miley integrates her life as Hannah into her "true" identity by way of incorporating Miley into her pop star persona—by very publicly inciting into visual discourse her life's secret.

Hannah Montana promotes same sex friendship just as it presents oppositional tropes of girlhood, attempting to pit celebrity and post-feminist femininity against an image of white, upper/middle class domestic girlhood, though the similarities often outweigh the differences. Doubling can offer multiple identifications and an expanded, unfixed notion of identity, much in the same way that calling attention to gender performativity might. But doubling as a way of complicating subjectivity can also further individualize characters and the dilemmas they face, foreclosing some identificatory possibilities. Just as doubling allows for girls' power as subjects to multiply and become visible in productive ways, within and perhaps beyond the confines of this narrative, it also presents parameters within which performances of girlhood must circulate. While iterations of the girls' postfeminist masquerade(s) may implicate them in their own sexual objectification and the objectification of others, doubling can simultaneously expose girls' subjectivity and agency as a function of the narrative, reliant on interpretation, but also dictated by profit motives and conventional discourses of girlhood.

Concluding Thoughts

To be understood as a girl, "a lucky girl" who deep down is "just like you,"⁴ Miley Stewart relies upon the mundane, supposed ordinariness of her home and school experiences, but her leisurely life in Malibu cannot be sustained without her career as

famous singer, Hannah Montana. And as the normalization of white, upper-middle class girlhood in the program reveals, she also needs to avoid questioning what differences may lay between her and “you” in her audience. Tensions between Miley’s desires for both a normal girlhood and the enjoyment of her extraordinary celebrity drive the show, while the breakdown of that manufactured binary signals its end. Though Hannah Montana is one in a long history of Disney’s female characters—in animation and live-action, in films and on television—whose femininity is enacted joyfully in the aesthetics and maintenance of the body for the pleasure of others, she also challenges gender expectations. As I have discussed above, Miley Stewart’s celebrated alterego allows her to publicly express the contradictions in her life, as a powerful subject with a voice and as a girl living within structures of power that work to contain and control her. The sort of “empowerment” generated through public visibility can be turned against girls and women in the context of postfeminist discourse, in which the choices they make (or are limited to) may serve as not only regressive, ritual reproductions of femininity, but as particularly anti-feminist strategies employed for commercial gain.

Because girls constitute increasingly significant target markets for popular U.S. media and consumer products yet are often overlooked in theories of postfeminism, this project necessarily attempts to carve out space for understanding discourses of contemporary girlhood within postfeminist media culture. Disney’s Hannah Montana series is a rich text for such analysis. The show’s iterations of a postfeminist masquerade present a performance of “girly-ness” (particularly via Hannah Montana and her connection to Miley Cyrus) as the goal of celebrity and as an aspirational choice for girls—as distinguishable from notions of an authentic girlhood. Yet, white, class-

privileged, and financially dependent girlhood becomes normalized through characters like Miley Stewart and Lilly Truscott, and is, inherently, inseparable from the performances of postfeminist girly-ness that sustain those characters and their world. Instances of emphasized femininity, juxtaposed with instances of failed femininity, contribute to the show's construction of fragmented and alternative girlhoods. Yet, the doubling used to reproduce resistant or oppositional representations of girlhood works also to uphold heteronormative gender conventions—the so-called alternative girl reifies both the “normal” girl and the celebrated girl. The use of stereotypical as well as alternative gender presentation(s) in Hannah Montana illustrates some of the tensions that may arise in girl-focused programs that attempt to sustain normative, hegemonic representations of gender while addressing girls as always/already “empowered” subjects. Reading this program through a postfeminist framework, however, also reveals how such “empowerment” can be put to work in service of heteronormative gender conventions to construct girlhood as powerful only as it conforms to a postfeminist sensibility.

In addition to exploring discourses of girlhood in postfeminist culture, I hope this article can constitute a starting point for more industry-focused analyses of the functions of The Walt Disney Company in the reproduction and dissemination of discourses of girlhood. While the blurring of “real” and celebrity worlds helps craft postfeminist girlhood in Hannah Montana, the show's positioning of “real” and celebrity girlhoods in relation to the maintenance of an idealized feminine body consequently generates consumer markets for a multitude of other Disney texts and products, not to mention for the beauty and fashion industries. Thus, it is important for feminist media studies researchers not only to continue to analyze representations of contemporary girlhood in

popular media, but also to interrogate the investment of major media conglomerates in the construction and maintenance of certain discourses of girlhood and to explore girls' own labor within media empires like that of The Walt Disney Company.

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Notes

1. The pilot reached 5.4 million viewers, and the program retained an audience of about 200 million worldwide through 2008. In addition, it's an Emmy Award nominee, and Miley Cyrus received Teen Choice Awards, Kids' Choice Awards, and the Gracie Allen Award for "Outstanding Female Lead—Comedy Series (Child/Adolescent)" each year the series aired in its original run.
2. The song lyrics, property of Walt Disney Music Company (2006), have been transcribed from episodes and collected from <http://www.metrolyrics.com/hannah-montana-lyrics.html>.
3. Silverman, Stephen M. (2008) "Miley Cyrus: I'm Sorry for Photos," online at <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20195785,00.html>.
4. These are lyrics from one of the songs performed on the show and on the soundtrack, "Just Like You," property of Walt Disney Music Company (2006).

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